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SUBJ: RAI-TV REFORM: A REFLECTION OF THE CURRENT PLITICAL STRUGGLE

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SUMMARY: ITALY'S STATE RADIO AND TELEVISION (RAI-TV) MONOPOLY IS THE MOST IMPORTANT MASS INFORMATION MEDIUM IN THE COUNTRY AND IS THE DOMINANT INFLUENCE IN SHAPING PUBLIC OPINION. UNTIL NOW IT HAS BEEN UNDER THE DIRECT FORMAL CONTROL OF THE GOVERNMENT WHICH, IN PRACTICE, HAS MEANT THE DC PARTY. THE CONTROL HAS OFTEN, HOWEVER, BEEN MORE FORMAL THAN REAL, WITH MUCH OF RAI'S OUTPUT BEING TO THE LEFT OF THE MAJORITY OF THE DC PARTY. RECENTLY ENACTED LEGISLATION WOULD "REFORM" RAI BY TRANSFERRING CONTROL TO PARLIAMENT AND BY GIVING THE DC PREPONDERANT INFLUENCE IN ONE OF THE TWO TV CHANNELS WITH THE LAY PARTIES HAVING THE OTHER. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE REFORM REMAINS BLOCKED BY THE INABILITY OF THE POLITICAL PARTIES TO AGREE ON APPOINTMENTS OF KEY PERSONNEL IN RAI. THE DISPUTE CONCERNS PRIMARILY THE APPOINTMENTS OF THE HEAD AND OF THE NEWS DIRECTOR OF THE CHANNEL TO BE DOMINATED BY THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS (D). THAT A DISPUTE SHOULD ARISE AT ALL AT THIS STAGE IS BASICALLY A REFLECTION OF THE POLICY STRUGGLE NOW UNDERWAY WITHIN THE DC PARTY. THE ZACCAGNINI SECRETARIAT IS ATTEMPTING

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TO REPLACE NOMINEES OF THE PARTY'S CENTER-RIGHT MAJORITY

WITH OTHERS WHO CAN BE COUNTED ON TO SUPPORT THE POLICIES OF MORO AND ZACCAGNINI. GIVEN RAI-TV'S HIGHLY POLITICIZED NATURE AND PREPONDERANT ROLE IN SHAPING ITALIAN PUBLIC OPINION, THE ISSUE IS CRUCIAL FOR THE CONTENDING GROUPS IN THE DC. UNTIL RESOLVED, ISSUE HAS POTENTIAL TO PROVOKE OPEN CONFRONTATION WITHIN THE DC WHICH COULD BRING DOWN THE ZACCAGNINI LEADERSHIP BEFORE ITS TIME, AND THEREBY RISK A GOVERNMENT CRISIS. END SUMMARY.

1. SEVEN MONTHS AFTER THE LABORED BIRTH OF ITALIAN RADIO AND TELEVISION (RAI-TV) REFORM, IMPLEMENTATION OF THE LAW REMAINS A BONE OF CONTENTION BETWEEN THE POLITICAL FORCES SEEKING TO DETERMINE THE NEW DIRECTION OF THE COUNTRY IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE JUNE REGIONAL ELECTIONS. TO UNDERSTAND THE ISSUE WHICH NOW THREATENS TO HASTEN THE DEMISE OF THE ZACCAGNINI LEADERSHIP, WITH UNFORESEEN CONSEQUENCES FOR THE MORO GOVERNMENT, IT IS NECESSARY TO APPRECIATE BOTH THE IMPORTANCE OF RAI IN SHAPING PUBLIC OPINION AND THE INEVITABLE POLITICIZATION OF THE INSTITUTION WITHIN THE ITALIAN SYSTEM.

2. RAI-TV IS A STATE MONOPOLY OF ALL NATIONAL BROADCASTING, BY ANY MEANS. AS SUCH IT IS THE ONLY MASS INFORMATION MEDIUM WHICH REACHES INTO EVERY TOWN AND HOME IN A COUNTRY WHICH RANKS AMONG THE LOWEST IN EUROPE IN READERSHIP OF NEWSPAPERS AND MAGAZINES. ALL PARTIES HAVE CONSEQUENTLY GIVEN ITS STAFFING CLOSE ATTENTION, AND EVERY JOURNALIST AND OFFICIAL OF ANY IMPORTANCE HAS HIS PARTY LABEL. UNTIL LAST SPRING, RAI-TV WAS DIRECTLY CONTROLLED BY THE GOVERNMENT AND THEREFORE A VIRTUAL MONOPOLY OF THE CENTER-LEFT PARTIES.

3. PROMPTED BY A 1974 SUPREME COURT DECISION ORDERING REFORM OF THE MONOPOLY TO GUARANTEE STANDARDS OF FAIR ACCESS, OBJECTIVITY, AND PROFESSIONAL COMPETITION IN THE PRESENTATION OF THE NEWS, REFORM LEGISLATION WAS FINALLY PASSED IN APRIL 1975. THOUGH THE STANDARDS ORDERED BY THE COURT ARE MUCH HONORED IN THE LANGUAGE OF THE LAW, THE POLITICAL REALITIES OF THE ITALIAN SITUATION DETERMINED THAT THE ENTITY WOULD EMERGE EVEN MORE POLITICIZED THAN PREVIOUS-

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SLY. THE REFORM ACHIEVED TWO FUNDAMENTAL POLITICAL OBJECTIVES DESIRED ESPECIALLY BY THE LEFT, BUT FAVORED BY ALL THE DC'S CENTER-LEFT PATNERS: (1) PASSAGE OF FORMAL CONTROL FROM THE GOVERNMENT TO PARLIAMENT; AND (2) CONSEQUENT REDUCTION OF THE DC'S HITHERTO PREPONDERANT FORMAL CONTROL OVER THE ENTITY. THESE MEASURES OPENED RAI-TV TO THE DIRECT INFLUENCE OF ALL PARTIES REPRESENTED IN PARLIAMENT. (COMMENT: THE DC'S CONTROL HAS BEEN MORE FORMAL THAN RAL. THE POLITICAL TONE

OF RAI HAS, IN RECENT YEARS, MOVED STEADILY TO THE LEFT OF THE MAJORITY OF THE DC. HOWEVER, RAI'S PERFORMANCE HAS PLEASED NO ONE: THE PCI FREQUENTLY COMPLAINS AND THE DC IS CONSTANTLY FRUSTRATED BY ITS INABILITY TO CONTROL RAI'S EDITORIAL STAFF. THE REASONS FOR LACK OF EFFECTIVE DC CONTROL ARE MANIFOLD: THE DC'S GROWING PROPENSITY TO AVOID IDEOLOGICAL CONFRONTATIONS WITH THE LEFT ON DOMESTICALLY "IRRELEVANT ISSUES" LIKE INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS; THE LEFTIST SLANT OF MOST YOUNG JOURNALISTS AND ARTISTS, INCLUDING THOSE OF THE DC; DC VULNERABILITY TO SOCIALIST DEMANDS IN ORDER TO KEEP THE PSI IN THE MAJORITY; THE DC'S TENDENCY TO PROCRASTINATE FACING UP TO ANY CHALLENGE, ETC. DC PASSIVENESS IN THE FACE OF THESE DEVELOPMENTS IS ITSELF A REFLECTION OF THE PARALYZING DIVISIONS WITHIN THE PARTY, STILL UNRESOLVED.)

4. PARLIAMENT'S ABSOLUTE CONTROL OVER RAI-TV WAS ASSURED BY SETTING UP A 40-MEMBER SUPERVISING COMMITTEE WITH POWERS WHICH REACH DOWN TO ALL LEVELS. THESE INCLUDE NOMINATION OF 10 OF THE 16 MEMBERS OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS -- 6 BY CORPORATE LAW MUST BE NOMINATED BY THE SHAREHOLDERS, I.E., THE GOVERNMENT WHICH UNDER THE REFORM MUST OWN ALL SHARES; GUIDELINES FOR PROGRAMMING; NORMS FOR ADVERTISING; DIRECT FORMULATION OF PROCEDURES FOR ALL POLITICALLY SENSITIVE PROGRAMS SUCH AS RAI'S "MEET-THE-PRESS" SHOW; AND THE SOLE COURT OF APPEAL AGAINST DENIAL OF ACCESS (APPLICATIONS FOR ACCESS ARE DECIDED BY A SUBCOMMITTEE).

5. GIVEN THE POLITICIZED NATURE OF THE REFORM, IT WAS QUICKLY APPARENT TO OBSERVERS THAT "PROFESSIONAL COMPETITION BETWEEN THE TWO CHANNELS" MEANT THAT THE DC WAS SLATED TO CONTROL ONE CHANNEL (THE "WHITE" CHANNEL),

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AND THE SOCIALIST-LED "LAY" FORCES THE SECOND (THE "RED" CHANNEL). A THIRD TV CHANNEL IS PROVIDED FOR IN THE LAW BUT NOTHING HAS YET BEEN DONE TO SET IT UP; THE THREE EXISTING RADIO NETWORKS ARE ALSO BEING DIVIDED UP POLITICALLY.

6. HAVING REACHED AGREEMENT IN SETTING UP THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS IN THE IMAGE AND LIKENESS OF PARLIAMENT (EXCEPT FOR THE ARBITRARY EXCLUSION OF THE EXTREME RIGHT MSI-DN), THE PARTIES HAVE BEEN HUNG-UP SINCE LAST SUMMER ON THE REORGANIZATION OF THE INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURE AND THE ALL IMPORTANT APPOINTMENTS OF KEY PERSONNEL. THE LATTER CONCERN ESPECIALLY THE GENERAL AND NEWS DIRECTORS OF THE TV CHANNELS AND RADIO NETWORKS. THE FORTUNES OF VARIOUS NOMINEES ARE REGULARLY DISCUSSED IN THE PRESS

AND ALWAYS MEASURED BY THE FAVOR THEY ENJOY WITH THIS OR THAT PARTY. HOWEVER, NONE CAN BE APPOINTED UNTIL ALL ARE AGREED. IN KEEPING WITH THE POLITICIZED NATURE OF THE EXERCISE, THE APPOINTMENTS ARE BEING HANDLED AS A FINELY BALANCED PACKAGE.

7. THE PRESENT AND PERHAPS FINAL ROADBLOCK TO AGREEMENT CONCERNS THE DESIGNATIONS OF THE GENERAL AND NEWS DIRECTORS OF THE SO-CALLED CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC CHANNEL. THAT IT COULD BECOME A ROADBLOCK AT ALL RESULTS FROM THE PRESENT WEAKNESS AND DISUNITY OF THE DC. BASICALLY, IT IS A REFLECTION OF THE SPLIT IN THE DC ITSELF OVER THE TWO LINES OF POLICY IN CONFLICT: THE MORO-ZACCAGNINI FORCES ARE TRYING TO SUBSTITUTE NOMINEES OF THE CENTER-RIGHT DC MAJORITY WITH INDIVIDUALS WHO CAN BE TRUSTED TO CARRY ON THEIR CONCILIATORY LINE TOWARD THE PCI. THE SPLIT IN THE DC HAS IN TURN PROVIDED AN OPENING TO THE SOCIALISTS AND COMMUNISTS TO CHALLENGE THE NOMINEES OF THE CENTER-RIGHT DC MAJORITY FOR THESE POSITIONS, AND EFFECTIVELY ALLIED THEM WITH THE ZACCAGNINI SECRETARIAT ON THE ISSUE.

8. FINDING HIMSELF UNABLE TO IMPOSE HIS WILL ON THE MAJORITY WITHIN THE PARTY, ZACCAGNINI FIRST TRIED TO FINESSE IT BY VIRTUOUSLY LEAVING THE DECISION UP TO THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS, WHERE IT FORMALLY BELONGS. NEVERTHELESS, DESPITE A ZACCAGNINI-DEMARTINO MEETING ON THE ISSUE, CONFIDENTIAL

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THE MOVE FAILED FOR REASONS YET TO BE CLARIFIED. (ONE SOURCE STATES THAT DEMARTINO REFUSED TO HAVE THE PSI EXPRESS A FORMAL VETO IN THE BOARD AGAINST THE UNDESIRABLE DC CANDIDATES. IF SO, HE WAS PROBABLY DETERRED BY HIS OWN PARTY'S VULNERABILITY TO CRITICISM ON HOW ITS OWN NOMINEES WERE IMPOSED.)

9. ZACCAGNINI HAS NOW TAKEN THE PROBLEM BACK WITHIN HIS OWN PARTY WHERE IT MAY BE CONSIDERED AT A MEETING OF THE DC DIRECTORATE NOVEMBER 12. IF A COMPROMISE IS NOT REACHED BETWEEN THE ZACCAGNINI AND CENTRIST FORCES, THE DISPUTE COULD FLARE INTO AN OPEN CONFRONTATION WITH UNPREDICTABLE CONSEQUENCES. DC SOURCES BELIEVE THAT A COMPROMISE IS MORE LIKELY THAN AN OPEN RUPTURE WITHIN THE PARTY ON THIS ISSUE. HOWEVER, THEY BELIEVE ALSO THAT AN OPEN SPLIT IN THE DC AT THIS STATE COULD THREATEN THE LIFE OF THE MORO GOVERNMENT.

10. COMMENT: FORMALLY, REGARDLESS OF HOW THE CURRENT DISPUTE OVER NOMINEES IS RESOLVED, THE DC'S POWER BASE WITHIN RAI-TV REMAINS STRONG. THOUGH IT HAS LOST THE BATTLE TO SET UP AND STAFF A COORDINATING SECRETARY GENERAL, IT HAS

ALREADY TAKEN OVER THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL'S JOB WHICH IS THE
SINGLE MOST POWERFUL POSITION FOR DAY-TO-DAY OPERATIONS OF
THE RAI-TV. ALSO, THE DC HAS 7 OF THE 16 MEMBERS OF THE
BOARD OF DIRECTORS. THE DC'S PRINCIPAL PROBLEM REAMAINS
ITS OWN INTERNAL DIFFERENCES.BEAUDRY

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